

Hoover Stayed On King Even A

WASHINGTON—The vendetta against Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., didn't end with his murder. The old FBI bulldog J. Edgar Hoover, who had tried to blacken King's name while he was alive, also tried to tarnish his death.

Not long after King was buried on the balcony of his Memphis motel on April 4, 1968, Hoover sent word to me that the motive behind the murder was not racism but cuckoldry, that the assassin apparently had been hired by a jealous husband.

I have held back this story for more than seven years because of my rule against revealing sources. But Hoover is now fading from the contemporary scene into history. His incredible attempt to panic King into committing suicide, it seems to me, also abrogates any right he may have to confidentiality. Therefore, I have decided it is in the public interest to tell the story.

Back in 1963, I was on good terms with the old FBI curmudgeon. He sent word through an intermediary that King's killer, James Earl Ray, had been in Los Angeles shortly before he returned east to stalk the civil rights leader.

Hoover's messenger suggested that Ray had been hired by a jealous husband, who had become enraged by the discovery that his wife had borne King's child. The intermediary identified the Los Angeles couple and showed me supporting data, including an FBI report describing a passionate interlude between the wife and Dr. King in a New York City hotel.

I was eager, of course, to find out who was behind the assassination. So I flew to Los Angeles and did my damndest to confirm the FBI leads. I waylaid the wife and husband separately for confrontational interviews and questioned others who might

have known of the alleged love affair, the paternity of the child or the attitude of the husband toward King.

I could find absolutely no evidence which contradicted the couple's own explanation that Dr. King was an honored friend of the family, a frequent guest in their home and nothing more.

I also discovered with deepening apprehension that there were no FBI agents on this trail that was supposed to be so hot. I returned to Washington satisfied that the FBI story was erroneous and half convinced that it was a deliberate hoax.

Yet I was reluctant to believe ill of Hoover. Like so many others, I wanted to believe there was at least one rock of integrity in Washington. He had, after all, created a miracle — an honest and efficient police force out of what had been in 1924 a corrupt menagerie of drunks, hacks, misfits and courthouse hangers



on. So I kept the jury out on Hoover.

In late 1970 the jury came in, for me. I happened to be on an airplane with the late Rep. Hale Boggs, D-La., then the House Democratic leader. He told me how members of Congress were being intimidated, if not blackmailed, by Hoover.

He said that the FBI would

come upon a skeleton in a member's closet — a woman, a vice, a shady business associate — and then get word to him that an accusation against him had reached the FBI and they wanted to alert him so he could be on his guard. From then on, the congressman was likely to be a captive of Hoover's

For the next few days, I circulated among officials and newsmen who were likely to know something about the dark side of Hoover. I discovered that every last one of them was afraid of Hoover. A check of the newspaper morgues in late 1970 demonstrated the result of Hoover's carrot-and-stick mastery of public relations: decades of laudatory, often idolizing coverage; but no sustained, brass-knuckled, mass circulation attack and few criticisms of any kind.

Because official sh... powerful... an invest... In a serie... sporadic... 1970, thro... revealed

That H... \$50,000 for... name by... ernment... cepted an... the Hotel... Mar, Cali... millionai... that Hoov... up and ci...

Th... On...